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SUBJECT: SENIOR OFFICIAL PUBLICLY ENDORSES COMPREHENSIVE
PARTNERSHIP

¶1. A senior official in the Indonesian Department of Foreign Affairs has publicly endorsed the idea of a new partnership between the United States and Indonesia. Retno L.P. Marsudi, Director General for America and Europe, made the endorsement in an opinion piece in the English-language Jakarta Post on April 27. Marsudi recently returned from a week of meetings and consultations with U.S. and Indonesian officials in Washington, D.C., on this issue. The endorsement is the GOI's first public statement on the issue since the Secretary and Foreign Minister Wirajuda jointly called for a Comprehensive Partnership during the Secretary's visit to Indonesia in February. The following text is verbatim as printed in the newspaper.

¶2. TEXT OF JAKARTA POST ARTICLE

"Indonesia, the US: A New Partnership"
Retno L.P. Marsudi
The Jakarta Post, Monday, April 27, 2009

One could say that observing Indonesia-US relations has become more interesting since the Obama administration came into power, particularly after the visit of US state secretary Hillary Clinton to Jakarta in February 2009.

Indonesia-US relations have been and will always be a very important factor for both countries' foreign affairs. As the largest country in Southeast Asia, Indonesia is home to the largest Muslim population in the world and is the fourth most populous country in the world.

At the same time, as President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono mentioned during a speech at the London School of Economic and Political Sciences, Indonesia's history has never been an easy one, an epic story of survival against the odds.

However, such a picture of disorder and uncertainty no longer captures the Indonesia of today. Having overcome its trials and tribulations, Indonesia is now a resilient country that plays an active role in many strategic international issues such as climate change, interfaith dialogue, democracy as well as peace and security.

Amid the current international financial crisis, Indonesia remains as one of a handful of countries that continue to post positive projections of economic growth.

In March 2009, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) announced that Indonesia was one of the best performing economies. In addition, Indonesia has also recently taken the opportunity to play an active role in the G20.

Indonesia is now the third largest democracy in the world. The legislative election on April 9, 2009 was on the whole a fair, peaceful and transparent process.

Indeed, Indonesia's democracy has achieved a point of no return, transforming the country into a progressive force in

the international arena.

During Clinton's visit to Indonesia, she mentioned that as a country with the largest Muslim population, Indonesia is able to harmonize Islam, democracy, modernity and women's empowerment.

For Indonesia, the US was, is and will remain an important partner, particularly considering the latter's significant role in international affairs. The US possesses everything that a major power requires: a large population, a vast territory, a strong economy, a mighty military and so on. In general, relations between Indonesia and the US have been positive and stable, but remain "full of surprises".

Bilateral trade has increased from year to year, with figures reaching US\$21.7 billion in 2008, which is around 17 percent more than the total for 2007 (\$18.5 billion). The US is also among the biggest foreign investors in Indonesia.

Growing cooperation can also be seen in issues such as counter-terrorism, defense, education, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation. With such growth in relations as a backdrop, it comes as no surprise that the US decided to lift its travel ban on Indonesia.

During Clinton's visit to Indonesia, both governments agreed to develop a comprehensive partnership. Questions did emerge in response to the decision to establish such a relationship:

If the progress in bilateral relations in the past few years has been achieved without a comprehensive partnership, why now is there a sudden desire by both governments to broaden and deepen their relations through a comprehensive partnership mechanism?

In general, a comprehensive partnership reflects a certain level of maturity in bilateral relations between the two countries. It is a partnership that should always be based on equality, mutual respect and mutual benefit.

Trust and transparency also become very significant elements. All in all, every effort should be made to ensure that these requirements are in place in order for the partnership to work.

A Comprehensive Partnership provides a framework for the further strengthening of bilateral relations. It should be flexible, open and adjustable to dynamic and rapid developments in bilateral and international relations.

A Comprehensive Partnership should bring added value to the current bilateral relations. It should be innovative and capable of offering both traditional and innovative approaches to fulfilling the targets of the partnership.

In as such, failure to attain such added value would make the partnership merely an example of political bureaucracy. Thus, deliverables become a very important element in its success.

Priorities of cooperation could be wide ranging, from the climate change issue to energy security, food security, education, health, exchanges, economics and development, defense, peace and security.

The election of Barack Obama as the 44th president of the US provides a golden opportunity for both countries to develop their relations. For the first time, there is a US president who has certain emotional ties with Indonesia.

The change in the US administration, particularly the "O factor", and recent positive developments in Indonesia's domestic situation, were indeed among reasons for Indonesia to be chosen as one of the countries visited by the Clinton during her first trip abroad.

For the first time, most of Indonesia has high expectations

for improved relations with the US. The same could also be said of the Americans. During my official visit to the US a couple of days ago, I sensed the same expectation and clear optimism that the US should have better relations with Indonesia.

Bader, the senior director of the US National Security Council, mentioned that never before had Indonesia and the US had such a good opportunity in their bilateral relations.

While good relations are seen at the government level, can the same be said of the relations among Indonesians and Americans at the grass-root level?

The relations at grass-roots levels or through people-to-people contact remain at farer (sic) distance compared to those enjoyed at the government level. Consequently, every effort must be made to bring these two peoples closer.

In any democratic country, civil society plays a significant role in shaping the government policy, reflecting the general interest of the people. In the post-9/11 period, there were feelings of "distrust" between the two countries' peoples. As a pre-requisite to embarking on a new partnership, efforts are needed to remove such "distrust".

Policies in favor of strengthening people-to-people, contact should be adopted in immigration, education, intercultural and interfaith dialogues and education cooperation, and exchanges should be undertaken to strengthen this contact.

When receiving the visit of secretary Clinton in February 2009, President Yudhoyono mentioned that improving people-to-people contact through education should become a priority in the bilateral relations agenda of the two countries.

The benefits of adopting the new Comprehensive Partnership are obvious. The priorities are also clearly mentioned. It is now an urgent need for Indonesia and the US to seize the momentum - now, not later. Momentum never lasts long; it is a brief opportunity that should be acted on immediately.

In the mean time, special attention should also be paid to managing peoples high expectations. Failure to fulfill such expectations would be counter-productive and the success of the Partnership would depend on how both countries are able to bring more deliverables as "the meat" of the relations. Otherwise, the Comprehensive Partnership would end up becoming yet another sleeping document.

Hopes are high that the two countries' leaders would find a good time to officially announce the establishment of the Comprehensive Partnership. Together, between the governments and between the two peoples, we can make it happen.

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